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The Knowledge Base of Teaching English as an Additional Language: A Framework for Curriculum and Instruction

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Abstract

This paper presents a theoretical framework of the knowledge base of teaching English as an additional language. The paper is premised on the assumption that a knowledge base for teaching English as an additional language is essential despite significant variations in educational contexts and learners' backgrounds. The proposed framework is grounded in the extant literature and consists of three dimensions relative to 1) knowledge of academic content, 2) knowledge of specialized pedagogy, and 3) knowledge of students, schools, and communities. Each of these three dimensions encompasses other types of knowledge concerning language, literature, culture, and the process of language acquisitions as well as methods of teaching and assessment and evaluation. Students' characteristics, interaction dynamics, and motivations as well as how school and community factors may impact achievement are also discussed. The paper concludes with a suggested framework for the design and implementation of English teacher education programs in Lebanon and similar contexts in the Arab world where English is studied as an additional language for its vitality in the educational, commercial, and cultural domains.

Keywords: Knowledge base, English, Teacher education, Pedagogy, Culture

The Knowledge Base of Teaching English as an Additional Language: A Framework for Curriculum and Instruction

The question of what types of knowledge are brought into play in the context of teaching English as an additional language has intrigued researchers and practitioners for quite sometime now. According to Johnston and Irujo (2001), the knowledge base of language teaching "… has emerged as one of the central concerns of research in teacher education" in the 1990's (p. 4). These researchers maintain that the impetus of research about a generic knowledge base in teacher education dates back to Shulman's 1987 theoretical framework of teaching knowledge. Shulman (1987) formulated a theory of knowledge base of teaching that is comprised of various categories of knowledge including content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of learners and their characteristics, knowledge of educational contexts, and knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values (Johnston & Irujo, 2001).

The aforementioned types of knowledge provided a theoretical approach to the development of a teacher education knowledge base that was complemented by a policy and practice perspective. This perspective manifested itself in the form of professional standards, teaching procedures, and assessment techniques to ensure excellence in teaching (Fradd & Lee, 1998). Of particular relevance to the development of a teaching knowledge base from the policy and practice perspective were the initiatives of the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) guidelines. The NBPTS (1996) standards maintain that teachers need to a) demonstrate commitment to students and their learning, b) know their subjects, c) manage and monitor learning, d) reflect on their practice, and e) be members of a learning community. Similarly, the NCATE (1996) requirements for accreditation stipulate that higher education institutions have a specialized knowledge base of their teacher education programs that correspond to their mission statement. Along similar lines, attempts to create national standards for curriculum, instruction, and assessment have also contributed to the enhancement of the processes of teacher preparation as well as classroom practices, thereby corroborated efforts to develop a teaching knowledge base.

The preceding efforts at building a generic knowledge base for teaching were somehow echoed in the field of teaching English as an additional language. The widespread of English as a global language learned for its vitality in the various domains of commerce, technology, and education has underscored the importance of developing a knowledge base specific to teaching English. Despite significant variations in the educational experiences of learners, their characteristics and motivations for learning the language, and irrespective of the degrees of exposure to the target language of English in their environments, a common knowledge base for teaching English remains relevant (Fradd & Lee, 1998). Furthermore, the availability of information and resources for teaching English worldwide may facilitate efforts to conceptualize the core components of a knowledge base for language teaching.

According to Johnston and Irujo (2001), "… it was not until the mid 1990's – that serious thought began to be given to the question of what the knowledge base of language teaching might be" (p. 4). These researchers further maintained that language teaching was equated with the transmission of declarative knowledge of the language under study. Consequently,

professional preparation of language teachers simply entailed completion of an undergraduate major in the language under study and its literature. However, a more complex and contextualized view of the knowledge base of language teaching began to emerge as Freeman (1989) and Woods (1996) began to emphasize teachers' beliefs, assumptions, and cognition as important components of the knowledge base of language teaching. Later on, Freeman and Johnson (1998) proposed a view of ESL/EFL teacher education that focuses on the teaching activity itself as it occurs in its socio-cultural context. More recently, Graves (2009) called for an interconnected system of knowledge bases which underscores the importance of understanding the socio-cultural and political contexts in which teachers work as well as becoming cognizant of and reflective on their own conceptions and beliefs about teaching. Similarly, Bartels (2009) emphasized the value of contextually-linked learning tasks rather than abstract and theoretical approaches to language teacher education. This is in order to enable teachers to develop some domain-specific and organized implicit knowledge about language that can be easily used in actual teaching situations. Along similar lines, Hedgecock (2009) argued that teachers need to know the oral and written discourse conventions of language teaching in order to fully participate in their learning communities.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the various components of a knowledge base for language teaching in order to conceptualize a framework for curriculum planning and instruction. A basic premise behind this exploration is that there is at a present a need for curricular frameworks that aid curriculum planners, researchers, and practitioners in the processes of planning, implementing, and evaluating their endeavor of teaching English as an additional language. As such, the proposed framework is intended to serve as a working document consisting of a pool of general constructs for understanding the dimensions and domains of the knowledge base for English language teaching.

In developing the framework, we took into consideration the contextual variables that may impact teaching English in Lebanon and in other similar situations in the Arab world where English is increasingly spreading as an additional language due to its vitality in the various educational, commercial, and cultural domains. This spread of English has prompted the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education to introduce a new framework for education in 1994, followed by a new English language curriculum, textbooks, and comprehensive campaigns to train teachers in modern methods and techniques (Shaaban & Ghaith, 1997). These developments have underscored the need for a curricular framework and a teacher knowledge-base that will aid teacher education programs and training provider with a theoretical lens to view and plan there endeavor.

Consequently, we conducted analytical review of the extant literature in order to identify the threads that appear to run through theory, research, and practice with an eye to explore and conceptualize the types of knowledge need by teachers to implement a modern English curriculum that includes objectives and competencies in the cognitive and non-cognitive domains of schooling. The review was initially organized according to three main provisional categories that pertain to 1) knowledge of academic content, 2) knowledge of specialized pedagogy, and 3) knowledge of students, schools, and learning communities as suggested by Fradd and Lee (1998). Additional subcategories emerged within each main category as various bodies of knowledge were underscored in the literature as shown in the subsequent sections below.

A Framework of the English Language Knowledge Base

Figure 1 below presents the dimensions and components of the knowledge base for teaching English as an additional language that emerged from the literature review

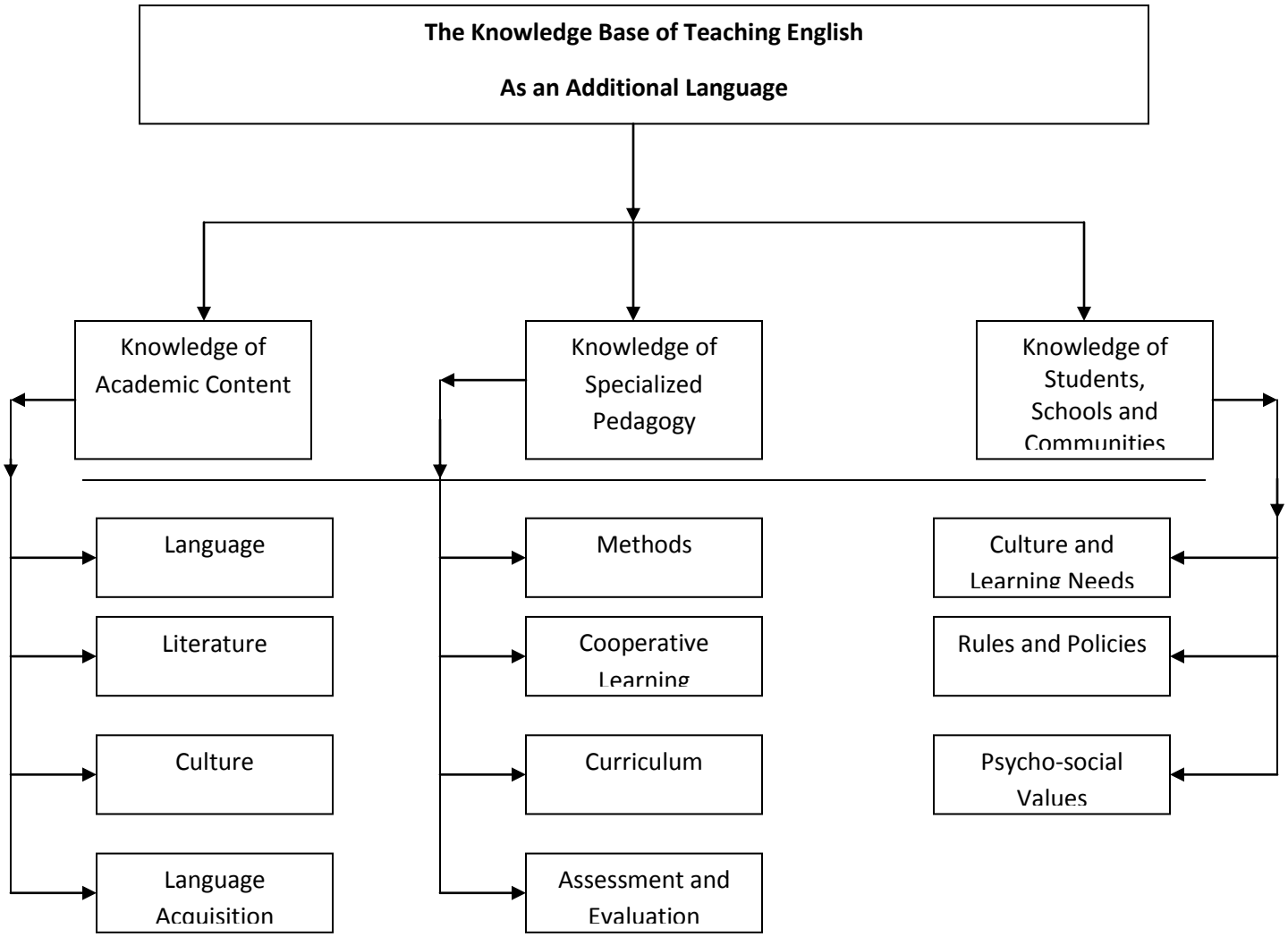

Figure 1 reveals that the knowledge base of teaching English as an additional language could be conceived as a three-dimensional construct consisting of 1) knowledge of academic content, 2) knowledge of specialized pedagogy, and 3) knowledge of schools, students, and communities. The academic knowledge component is comprised of bodies of knowledge relative to knowledge of the language, literature, culture, and the process of language acquisition. Meanwhile, specialized pedagogy entails knowledge of the methods of teaching a foreign language, cooperative learning, the curriculum, and the procedures of assessment and evaluation. Finally, knowledge of students, schools, and communities involves knowledge of students' cultures, learning styles and needs, motivations, patterns of interaction and participation, school rules and policies, and the knowledge of the socio-cultural composition of learners' communities more generally. The subsequent sections of the paper explicate the dimensions of the framework in more detail.

Knowledge of Academic Content in English Language Teaching Language

One of the most obvious and fundamental components of the requisite knowledge for teaching English is knowledge of the language itself and knowledge of the literature and culture associated with it. Specifically, teachers need to first comprehend and understand the English language, its literature, and the cultural postulates, values, and norms associated with it. Yet, the question of what does it mean to know a language has been controversial in applied linguistics. The customary conception of the knowledge of the language has in fact evolved over the past few decades from a narrow focus on linguistic knowledge to a more comprehensive view that includes sociolinguistic and pragmatic competencies. Back in 1957, Chomsky proposed his seminal theory of transformational generative grammar in which he distinguished between competence defined as one's knowledge of the language and performance defined as one's production and comprehension of language. According to Chomsky (1957), competence signified knowledge of the linguistic (grammatical) system of the language and encompassed bodies of knowledge relative to vocabulary, morphology, syntax, and phonemic-graphemic relations. Later on, Widdowson, (1978) acknowledged Chomsky's distinction between competence and performance, but called for a much broader conceptualization of competence, which led to the notion of communicative competence as an alternative to linguistic (grammatical) competence. Canale and Swain (1980) operationalized the notion of communicative competence as a multifaceted construct that encompasses linguistic as well as sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies. Specifically, linguistic competence was considered essential but not enough to enable one to communicate in a language other than his/her own. Rather, the appropriate use and understanding of language in various contexts (sociolinguistics), cohesion of form and coherence of thought (discourse), and communication strategies (strategic) competencies were also considered equally essential. Later on, Bachman (1990) proposed a model of language competence with two major types of abilities: organizational and textual competence. Organizational competence refers to controlling the formal structure of language and includes grammatical competence and textual competence to organize rhetoric and achieve coherence. Meanwhile, pragmatic competence encompassed illocutionary and sociolinguistic competences and referred to knowledge of the functions of language, sensitivity to the varieties of dialects, registers, naturalness of language as well as understanding of cultural referents and figures of speech.

Literature

Besides knowledge of the target language, teachers of English as an additional language need to know and understand the literature it embodies and the culture(s) associated with it. The widespread of English as a global language has resulted in the production of a significant body of world literature in English. While written in English, this body of literature often reflects certain stylistic and cultural peculiarities that are important and useful in teaching English as a global language to a culturally and linguistically diverse population of learners. Of particular relevance in this regard would be literary works produced in Africa, Asia, Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, and other parts of the globe where English is used as an additional language (See http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/landow/post/misc/authors.html) for a list of seminal authors by country.

Culture

The question of teaching for cultural understanding assumes a pivotal role in the English as an additional language knowledge base. Due to the exacerbation of violence and the widespread of misunderstandings and critical incidents at the international, national and communal levels, there has been a growing need to develop the skills of inter-cultural and intra-cultural communication. During the 1970's and the 1980's, several theorists attempted to devise models and frameworks for incorporating culture into foreign language instruction (e.g., Brooks, 1968; Nostrand, 1989). Later one, Seelye (1993) proposed an operational model of culture teaching that included the following six goals summarized by Omaggio (2001) as follows: 1) "developing interest in another culture and empathy toward its people, 2) realizing that the way people speak and behave is affected by social variables related to who they are and the role they play in society, 3) understanding that people think, act, and react in response to culturally conditioned images, and that effective communication requires discovery of what those images are, 4) recognizing that behavior is shaped by situational variables and the conventions of culture, 5) realizing that people use the options provided by their society for taking care of their basic needs, and 6) developing the ability to explore the culture---- and evaluating generalizations" (Omaggio, 2001, p. 351).

In addition, several strategies were proposed in the literature to teach culture in the language classroom. These strategies include: cultural islands, culture clusters, culture capsules, culture mini-dramas, folktales, and literature. As such, knowing what is involved in teaching the culture of the target language and being able to identify and utilize various strategies to achieve cultural goals in the classroom constitute an important component of the teaching knowledge base of English as an additional language.

Language Acquisition

In addition to the knowledge of language and its literature and culture, Fradd and Lee (1998) maintain that teachers of English as an additional language require specialized knowledge "within the fields of language acquisition, anthropology, and sociology in order to teach students' from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds" (p. 765). Specifically, these researchers maintain that teachers need to understand the process of language acquisition and the factors that may impact this process. As a matter of fact, the literature includes a number of conflicting theories that attempt to explicate how people acquire a language other than their own. Chief among these theories are the behaviorist, universal grammar, and the cognitive theories and the monitor hypothesis of language acquisition. The behaviorist theory is based on the tenets of the theories of Skinner (1957), Hilgard (1962), Chastain (1976), and Wardhaugh (1976). It maintains that human learning is similar to animal learning and the learner's mind is a tabula rasa. Language learning is perceived as a matter of habit formation through strengthening the associations between stimulus and response through reinforcement. As such, human language is considered as a sophisticated response system that can be acquired through drilling and repetition. Conversely, the universal grammar theory espoused by (Chomsky 1957; Ellis, 1985; Mclaughlin, 1990; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991) views language as a human-specific and genetically determined capacity. Biological mechanisms determine language acquisition and the human mind is perceived as an active agent that creates new language and utterances rather than just a passive recipient of environmental input. In turn, (Krashen, 1982) draws a distinction

between learning and acquisition as well as underscores the importance of the affective factors and developmentally-appropriate input as major determinants of language acquisition. Furthermore, this researcher maintains that there exists a natural order in the acquisition of grammatical structures and that acquisition initiates language utterances that are monitored by learning. Finally, it should be noted that the generic cognitive theory of Ausubel (1968) which emphasizes the importance of meaningful learning of the linguistic input that is relatable to existing knowledge structures as opposed to rote learning which is verbatim and arbitrary has influenced the field of teaching English as an additional language. For instance, other cognitive theorists (e.g., Tarone, 1982; Ellis, 1985) have maintained that learners' production of language is subject to variability, depending upon the degree of attention they pay to the form of language when they communicate. Meanwhile, Schneider and Shiffrin (1977) emphasize that automaticity in language use will be achieved only after attention to the skills and tasks to be mastered. Finally, it should also be noted that teachers need to know that the acquisition process is impacted by a number of factors such as age, gender, motivation, socio-economic status, prior experiences, and learning contexts as suggested by Fradd and Lee (1998).

Knowledge of Specialized Pedagogy

Methods

The knowledge of specialized pedagogy entails an understanding of the theoretical principles and an ability to apply the techniques of a number of foreign language teaching methods that have been in practice in one context or another during the past century and at present. This type of knowledge is important because it enables teachers to devise and deliver effective instruction as well as to reason what instructional methods and activities are particularly well-suited for the types of knowledge they would like their learners to comprehend and understand. These methods include the Grammar Translation Method, the Direct Method, the Audio-lingual Method, the Silent Way, Suggestopedia, Community Language Learning, Total Physical Response, and the Communicative Approach (Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Omaggio, 2001; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). In addition, cooperative learning (CL) has also been advocated as an effective approach in teaching language (Kagan, 1995; Kessler, 1992; McGroarty, 1989). According to Ghaith (2003) CL is a generic approach to instruction that emphasizes positive interdependence among group members and individual accountability, as well as cognitive and social skills. It encompasses the following methods: The Structural Approach (Kagan, 1989), Group Investigation (Sharan & Sharan, 1992), Student Team Learning (Slavin, 1995), and Learning Together (Johnson, Johnson, & Hulebec, 1993). Thus it is important for teachers to develop the requisite pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) to apply the dynamics and procedures of these CL methods in teaching various bodies of knowledge involved in teaching English as an additional language. In this regard Shaaban and Ghaith (2005) suggest that the Learning Together model is well suited for teaching reading, writing, speaking, and culture, Group Investigation for writing and culture, Jigsaw from the student team learning model for reading and literature, TGT and STAD, also from the student team learning model, for grammar, and cooperative structures for reading, writing, speaking, vocabulary, literature, and culture.

Curriculum

Teachers of English as an additional language need to understand the curricula of their schools as well as should develop the ability to create and adapt grade level curricula. Presently, there are several standards and frameworks intended to aid teachers in the planning and delivery of their instruction. Chief among these standards and frameworks are the proficiency guidelines of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign language (ACTFL), the Foreign Language Standards, and the English as a second language (ESL) K-12 standards proposed by the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) organization.

The ACTFL proficiency guidelines (1986) "were the first attempt by the foreign language teaching profession to define and describe levels of functional competence for the academic content in a comprehensive fashion (Omaggio, 2001, p. 9). These guidelines define and measure learners' abilities in speaking, listening, reading, and writing across four levels of proficiency, namely novice, intermediate, advanced, and superior. Furthermore, within the novice, intermediate, and advanced levels there are gradations of sub-levels that range from low to mid and high. Likewise, the guidelines include four interrelated criteria relative to global tasks/functions, context/content, accuracy, and text type. Specifically, the global task/functions criterion refers to real world tasks that language users perform in real life. Meanwhile, the context criterion refers to the settings and circumstances in which language is used. Finally, the content and accuracy dimensions refer to the topics of discourse used in assessment and the quality and precision of the message conveyed, respectively.

Along similar lines, the Standards for Foreign Language Learning (1996) stipulate that learners need to demonstrate evidence of engagement in communication, gaining knowledge and understanding of other cultures, comparing their own culture to the target culture, connecting with other disciplines in the target language and acquiring information, and participating in multilingual communities at home and around the world.

Finally, the ESL Standards (Short et al.,1996) proposed by (TESOL) aimed at determining the goals and standards needed to enable ESL learners to realize their personal, social, and career goals in an increasingly diverse and interdependent world. The standards were organized according to the three overarching goal areas of 1) using English to communicate in social setting, 2) using English to achieve in content areas and 3) using English in socially and culturally appropriate ways. Each goal encompassed three standards that specify students' level of knowledge and ability, a set of descriptors of representative behaviors, sample progress indicators, and classroom vignettes to demonstrate the standards in action and describe typical student and teacher activities.

Assessment and Evaluation

Assessment, defined as gathering evidence regarding how learners approach, process, and complete real life tasks in the target language, and evaluation defined as making decisions regarding learners' admission, placement, promotion and graduation, constitute an important aspect of the knowledge base of teaching English as an additional language. Consequently, teachers need to develop their knowledge of the steps involved in the assessment process as well as the techniques and formats it employs. These steps include knowledge of the purpose, choosing appropriate techniques of data gathering, scoring, and reporting results. The techniques

of data gathering include 1) testing with its various types (fill in the blanks, matching, multiple choice, true/false, short answers, and essay writing), 2) observation with its various formats (checklists, journals, reading logs, portfolios, videos of role-plays, audio-tapes of discussions) and 3) inquiry (interviews, questionnaires). Knowledge of these techniques and formats assumes greater importance with the wider acceptance of authentic and performance assessments as continuous processes alternative to standardized testing and traditional testing that adhere to the traditional testing criteria of objectivity, machine scorability, standardization, or cost-effectiveness (Huerta-Macias 1995).

According to Ghaith (2002) alternative and performance assessments underscore the importance of knowing a "…wide variety of formats" because these "formats show what the students can actually do rather than what they are able to recall" (p. 26). Alternative assessment also reflects the curriculum being taught and provides information on the strengths and weaknesses of each student. Furthermore, it provides multiple ways of determining the progress of students and can be more culturally sensitive and free of the linguistic and cultural biases inherent in traditional testing (Huerta-Macias 1995). Because alternative assessment is more closely intertwined with classroom instruction, it does not require a separate block of time to be administered because it is based on day-to-day instructional activities. Furthermore, Ghaith (2002) maintains that teachers need to consider a number of multifaceted issues when doing alternative assessment. These issues range from knowledge of the purpose, focus, and setting to awareness of the stakes and shareholders of assessment. Along similar lines, Johnson and Johnson (1996) maintain that "the purposes of assessment can be diagnostic, formative, or summative, whereas the focus can be the process of learning, the process of instruction, or the outcomes of learning and instruction. Likewise, the setting can be artificial (classroom) or authentic (real world) and the stakes can be low or high, depending upon whether the purposes of assessment are to determine, for example, the students' instructional needs (formative) or their admission to college (summative). Finally, the shareholders of assessment can be students and parents, the teaching staff, the administrators, colleges, and even potential employers." (Cited in Ghaith, 2002, p. 27). The issues involved in assessment become even more diversified when we consider the question of what gets assessed and evaluated. For instance, Johnson and Johnson (1996) maintain that teachers need to measure students' academic abilities, skills, and competencies as well as their attitudes and work habits. This suggests that in conducting alternative assessment, teachers need to know how to integrate assessment procedures into an ongoing instructional program, using various techniques and formats.

Technology

Computer assisted instruction (CAI) and computer management instruction (CMI) provide teachers with excellent opportunities to motivate their students and facilitate their learning and acquisition of English as an additional language. Specifically, Fradd and Lee (1998) maintain that the "applications of technology can provide valuable support for language learning through interactive feedback and visual cues linking real-world experience with academic content and discourse" (p. 768). Consequently, knowledge of the how and the why of the applications of technology in language teaching constitutes an important component of the knowledge base of language teaching. It should also be noted that teachers can benefit from the availability of many websites, data bases, and other internet resources that aid them in a very significant way in their endeavor to plan, deliver, and assess the outcomes of their instruction.

Knowledge of Students, Schools, and Communities

The third dimension of the teachers' knowledge base of English as an additional language relates to knowledge of students, schools, and communities. This dimension assumes vital significance due to the fact that learners of English as an additional language come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The interface of culture and learning is a complex and especially relevant issue in the context of teaching English as an additional language. The cultural and linguistic backgrounds of English language learners are diverse and can be characterized on a variety of dimensions that may affect learning. For instance, according to Sharan (2008), learners from "weak uncertainty avoidance" cultures tend to have higher degrees of tolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity than their counterparts from "strong uncertainty avoidance" cultures. Consequently, learners may differ in their levels of comfort with unstructured learning situations, vague objectives, and no stringent time tables. Specifically, while learners with weak uncertainty avoidance cultural backgrounds may value "intellectual disagreements and view them as facets of cognitive development" other learners from strong uncertainty avoidance cultural backgrounds "… prefer structured learning situations, precise objectives, detailed assignments, and strict time frames" (Sharan, 2008, p. 5). Furthermore, this researcher maintains that the patterns of classroom interaction vary across cultural boundaries. While learners from Euro-American backgrounds may feel comfortable to speak up in class spontaneously to express their personal opinions, learners from Latin and Southeast Asian backgrounds would expect the teacher to initiate communication and may only speak when called upon in order to avoid making mistakes. Along similar lines, Tharp and Gallimore (1991) maintain that learners from some Native American nations tend to wait patiently for their turns to speak and are not used to asking questions in class. It has also been observed for quite sometime now in the field of contrastive rhetoric that the writing styles of learners are also affected by culture in terms of many variables relative to the structure, organization, style and content of writing as maintained by Kaplan (1966), Bazerman and Prior (2004) and Connor (2004). Thus, is it important for teachers to know the cultural and the interaction patterns of their learners as well as the determinants and dynamics of their class participation with regard to reasoning, questioning, arguing, and critiquing as suggested by Cazden (1988) and Tikunoff (1987).It is also equally important to develop sensitivity to the effects of gender, learning styles, and learning disabilities, if present among learners. The effects of these variables on learning and achievement have been documented and recognized by educational researchers and practitioners alike and their importance can not be overlooked especially in the multilingual and multicultural classrooms. Finally, knowledge of the school rules and policies and an awareness of the psycho-social values of the community are also important given that teachers of English as an additional language may be expected to interpret learners' behaviors and explain cultural differences. In fact, the interface between schools and their communities forms an important part of the informal knowledge base that forms the foundation of instruction as suggested by Fradd and Lee (1998).

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to conceptualize and explicate the dimensions of a framework of the knowledge base of teaching in the context of teaching English as an additional language. Drawing on the results of an analytical review of the extant literature, the paper presented and explicated a three dimensional framework that describes the types of knowledge involved in language teaching. These types include knowledge of academic content, knowledge of

specialized pedagogy, and knowledge of students, schools and communities. Each type included additional sub-categories relative to various types of knowing a language, how to teach it, and how to interact with its learners in order to maximize their learning opportunities to become proficient in a language other than their own.

The proposed framework is intended to serve as a working document that program directors, curriculum planners, and teachers may use to plan and deliver their instruction. Likewise, higher education programs and teacher educators may consider the framework to plan and deliver instruction to prepare teachers of English as an additional language both in pre-service and in-service contexts, taking into consideration the learning needs of their learners as well as the various educational and socio-cultural factors that may influence their practice.

The implications of the framework hinge on the pivotal role of the intersection of content and pedagogy as the hallmark of the knowledge base of teaching as suggested by Shulman (1987). A basic premise in this regard is that teachers of English as an additional language need to develop their content knowledge of English, their knowledge of specialized pedagogy, and their knowledge of students, schools, and communities. These three types of knowledge are essential for the process of "pedagogical reasoning" that characterizes effective teaching and entails a transformation of the teachers' personal comprehensions and understandings of subject matter into forms and representations of knowledge that are easy to understand by learners. These forms and representations of knowledge include the creation of new analogies, metaphors, examples, discussions, demonstrations, and simulations that are presented by drawing on a repertoire of teaching methods and strategies that are adapted and tailored to fit the culture, gender, motivations, and the general characteristics of learners.

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